

# Mercury Fever

## Thermometer Information

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You may have heard about mercury fever thermometer collections in the news recently. **Please be aware that this is not an emergency situation.** Nonetheless, mercury is a concern, and the Department of Environmental Protection, with cosponsors, is currently planning a mercury thermometer collection program for Pennsylvania citizens.

Until an event is organized in your area, keep your mercury thermometer in its container and out of the reach of children to avoid breakage. Under no circumstances should you intentionally break a mercury thermometer. Watch this website for specific information about a collection in your area and for future information.

The information below is provided to help you better understand this subject.

### **What is the problem with mercury thermometers?**

*Mercury is a toxic substance that can harm both humans and wildlife. Many different products, including thermometers, contain mercury.*

### **Do thermometers really contain enough mercury to affect the environment?**

*Yes. If a mercury thermometer is disposed in the regular garbage and that garbage is burned in an incinerator, mercury vapors will be released into the air. Mercury in garbage that is landfilled can seep into the groundwater or can be released into the air as a toxic vapor. Airborne mercury eventually falls to the earth, often into rivers and lakes.*

### **What are alternatives to mercury?**

*Several types of alternative thermometers are available commercially.*

*These include:*

- Digital thermometers;*
- Glass gallium-indium-tin (galinstan) thermometers;*
- Flexible forehead thermometers; and*
- Ear canal thermometers.*

### **Additional Information**

If you have any additional questions after reading the information given, please contact the Division of Hazardous Waste Management at 717-787-6239.

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